

NOW FIRST PUBLISHED.

A Winning Hazard,

BY MRS. ALEXANDER.

Author of "Her Dearest Fos," "The Wooing O't," "A Crooked Path," &c., &c.

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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.—Kate and Alicia Carey are daughters of a Dublin solicitor, who, through misfortune, leaves Ireland for Wales with a view to economy. While in Wales they meet Mr. Brett, a wealthy railway contractor, who fell in love with Kate. He induces her father to go to London to seek employment, saying he will introduce him to his agents, Messrs. Winks and Boucher. This he fails to do. Kate Carey writes to Mr. Winks, unknown to her father, and encloses two letters in which Mr. Brett promises assistance, asking for employment for her father. She anxiously awaits a reply, but does not receive one. She, however, receives a letter from her cousin, Dick Travers, advising that he is in London and about to call upon them.

CHAPTER II.—Mr. Carey and his daughter, Kate, are in London. Kate is surprised by a visit from Dick Travers, who, among other things, tells her that he has secured a position as clerk in the office of Mr. Winks and Boucher. He also tells her that he has secured a position as clerk in the office of Mr. Winks and Boucher. He also tells her that he has secured a position as clerk in the office of Mr. Winks and Boucher.

CHAPTER III.—Kate, settled in her situation, proves herself useful. Kate is surprised by a visit from Dick Travers, who, among other things, tells her that he has secured a position as clerk in the office of Mr. Winks and Boucher. He also tells her that he has secured a position as clerk in the office of Mr. Winks and Boucher. He also tells her that he has secured a position as clerk in the office of Mr. Winks and Boucher.

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tiful, impulsive girl, to be wretchedly poor." Here the object of his thoughts returned, looking as if the whole of a summer day's sunshine had permeated her soul, beamed from her eyes, and played on her lips. She immediately began to move some books and other impedimenta from the table, and took out the sugar from their chiffonier, that indispensable piece of lodging-house furniture at the date of this "true tale."

"Where is Alicia?" asked Travers, placing a chair for his young hostess, as Matilda entered with a somewhat battered tray, and the usual appliance for afternoon tea, including a small brown teapot, its spout very vividly cracked.

"Alicia! Oh, she is out. Thank you, Matilda; be sure the water is boiling."

"That is another piece of luck, she continued, as Matilda left the room to infuse the tea.

"She has an engagement to inspect the practising of a stupid rich girl, an hour and a half every day, but she often gets off with only an hour's work, so she stays two hours on Thursday, and I am so sorry she will miss you."

"I am very sorry to miss her, but now I am in town for some months I hope to see a good deal of you."

"I hope you will, but it is a frightfully long way to come. Dick. We can hardly hope to see you often, especially as you will be busy. Have you a great deal to do?"

"Mine is rather intermittent work, but Lord Balmuir is preparing for a vigorous campaign against sundry abuses, so I shall have rather more to do in future."

"Is Lord Balmuir well?" asked Kate, covering the teapot, just brought back, with a pretty cosy.

"Yes, he is a very good fellow, and a sensible, useful one, but no orator, but so much the better."

"Why do you think so? The power of speaking is a grand gift."

"A statesman is better without it," returned Travers, stirring his tea. "He is too often carried away by the wind of his own words when he has the gift."

"Do you think so? Is there nothing of inspiration in eloquence?"

Travers shook his head. "I prefer quiet deliberate conviction to inspiration—in politics at all events."

There was a short pause, when Travers, speaking as if out of his thoughts, asked, "How old were you, Kate, when I first paid you a visit in Dublin?"

"I am not sure; about ten, I think. You used to tell me stories of your hunting adventure in Cashmere. Then the next time you came you had been in Africa. That was a good long while after. Our Scotch cousin, Tulloch, was with us that year. He had come home from India for his health, and was going out again. Don't you remember how we used to laugh at his accent?"

Travers did not reply. He was gazing at the fire in a thoughtful fashion. "I am sorry papa and Alicia are out; I am afraid you could not wait to see them," she continued, blushing at her consciousness that there was nothing in the way of dinner to which she could venture to invite them.

Travers looked at his watch. "No, I have already overstayed my time," he said. "I have to call at one or two places in town; and there is a dinner at Lord Balmuir's to-day—a political affair. But I will come out again as soon as I can."

"Yes, do. And Dick, Sunday is the best time; we dine in the middle of the day on Sundays. Suppose you come and make your luncheon with us. It would do dear papa a world of good—and Alicia too."

"And Kate?" said Travers, with a kindly smile. "And Kate, too—heaps of good," she returned, her lustrous, sparkling eyes meeting his fully, frankly.

"Then, of course, I shall come," he exclaimed, rising. "It will be a public benefactor on such easy terms. I am awfully glad Mr. Carey has found something to do. There is nothing so depressing as enforced idleness. I shall watch the development of this new love of yours with deep interest, Kate. I don't think constancy is your virtue. Eh?"

"I am not sure," she returned, with a saucy smile. "Ah! yes, I am true to my friends, I hope!"

"What then—is your resuscitated mummy to be nearer and dearer than a friend?"

Kate laughed. "I shall be very fond of him, I assure you, if he shows me how to make some money. I suppose you go to dances as well as to dinners, Dick?"

"Not often—I do not dance."

"What a loss. You don't know how delightful it is to dance. I never was but at one ball—that was just before our troubles—and it was delicious! I had such nice partners. I was quite in love with them all."

"Ah! my sweet cousin, there is safety in a multitude. Now I must say good-bye till Sunday; but if you or your father happen to want me in the meantime, you have my address."

"Yes, Dick, I have it written down! Well, good-bye, and you will be sure to come on Sunday."

"Without fail!" returned Travers, smiling down into the earnest eyes upturned to his. "Good-bye, my dear cousin!" And he was gone.

Kate put the cups and saucers on the battered tray and rang for Matilda. When she disappeared with it Kate walked to the window, and stood looking out on the bushes and trees, which were just beginning to show the first faint flush of green, but Kate did not see them—she was lost in thought. Her hands clasped and dropped before her, gazing far away into the background of the past. The evening was drawing in, and the pale melancholy peculiar to the light of these first lengthening days, before the chills of winter have been quite vanquished by the genial warmth and vitality of spring, seemed to sadden her. The present and the future seemed dark. It was delightful to see Cousin Dick, but she was suddenly struck with the contrast between his position and her own—why she could not tell. He was poor too comparatively poor—but he stood alone. He was not overburdened, like her dear father and herself. He had lost his money like themselves, but he had kept his position. He still enjoyed as good society as was to be found in England. Yes, the girl which had opened between them was widening, and would continue to widen. It was only a natural—only inevitable. Dick was as good a fellow as ever lived, kind and true, but in was not likely he would often care to come out to a remote suburban district, to bestow his attention on his impoverished relatives, and she must not allow herself to expect it, nor be unjust to Dick in their intimacy gently and gradually died away.

It would be better so, for she could not endure the idea of his coming to consider her and hers as bores to whom some degree of cousinly observance was due.

Pride had a larger share in Kate Carey's somewhat complex nature than casual acquaintances, who were attracted by the bright caressing manner which was natural to her, ever imagined. After a longer time spent in these thoughts than she was aware—recalling the large comfortable home in which her early youth was spent, the kind familiar faces that surrounded her, the pleasant easy life where no severe lines were insisted on, and faults, loudly upbraided for a moment, were quickly forgiven and forgotten. How different was the world into which she had now dropped! Here stern necessity and reality ruled, and every mistake brought its punishment.

"Why, it is past six! What can have kept Alicia?" said Kate, half aloud. I must not dream here any longer. If we must give up Cousin Dick and the kind of people he lives with, we must—that will not exhaust all the good things of life. But oh, how nice he is. He is really much better looking than many who are thought handsome men. There is something so pleasant and sensible in his voice and laugh. One could never imagine such a sure saying anything foolish or ignominious. I am sure he will get on and do something yet. There is a good long stretch of life before me too, but I shall never do much. I don't think I have any ambition—only to be a little independent. I am not clever. Thank God, work does not seem so odious to me as it used. At all events, I can make the room look nice and comfortable before Alicia and papa come in. It seems dark and dreary. I must not let myself be weak or cowardly, nor sentimental either. No one's life is always dark. Life would be impossible if it were."

Mr. Carey was much elated on hearing that Travers had called.

"I must look him up," he said, "for I have an idea—a first-rate idea, faith!—and he might help me with it. Bring me the map of Ireland, Kate, darling, as soon as the table's cleared. I'll show you where they might run a branch line to a little village on the north coast, where there's only a couple or three hours' crossing to Scotland, just about the part where Lord Balmuir's coal-mines lie, and we might establish a great trade to supply all Ireland with Scotch coal, begad! I wonder no one has thought of it before. It would cost a mere trifle to lay down a railway, and by George, it would make my fortune. I ought to get a big share of the plunder, and I'll not work for nothing. I can tell you. Get the map me, jewel!"

pleasant hour was passed poring over the map and listening to their father's description of the country, where he used to go duck-shooting.

"God be with long ago! when I used to be staying with old O'Donnell, of Rath Coolin, the biggest man in all the county. Ah! life was worth living then!" and he branched off into various anecdotes of his adventures in the blessed days of youth. His daughters listened appreciatively, and Kate forgot her gloomy anticipations and reflections of a couple of hours before.

Finally the last post brought Kate a letter which sent her to bed with an invigorating impression that she was on the highroad to fortune.

"Dear Madam,"—"Dear Madam," repeated Kate, "that makes me feel at least a hundred." "Reverting to our conversation on the subject of copying law papers when you called at this office, should you still be in the same mind I shall be happy to give you further information on the subject if you will call on me at my private residence, No. 17, Paragon Terrace, when my sister will be happy to receive you. As your residence is near at hand, this is more convenient and suitable than another visit to the office; also I can give you somewhat more time in the evening. I shall then expect to see you to-morrow or next day about 7-15 p. m."

"I am, dear madam," "Yours faithfully," "Samuel Winks."

"To Miss Carey," "Oakley Villas," "Notting-hill."

"I declare that little man is a real darling," cried Kate, her eyes sparkling as she finished reading this epistle aloud. "I began to fear he had forgotten me."

"Not he," said Carey, holding out his hand for the letter. "It's not every day he sees a girl at all, let alone a girl like my Katey."

"It will be nice for you to do something, dear, and something quietly at home!" exclaimed Alicia, who had a motherly anxiety about her handsome sister. "I'm sure though people talk about 'filthy lucre,' it's delightful to touch the lucre one earns. I am always proud of myself when my pay-day comes round. I only wish I had another pupil or two."

"Ah, they'll come, for you deserve luck; if it's luck to come down to take pay from ignorant money-grabbers," exclaimed Carey. "Get away to your bed's darlin', I'll put out the gas and see to the fire."

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It could not be so difficult to do, as all sorts of stupid boys managed to acquire a legal hand. Why shouldn't she? As the hour of her appointment drew near, however, her spirits fell to zero. The prospect of encountering Miss Winks was rather appalling. First, it was amazing to find such a creature existed. It seemed impossible that the Winks she knew could belong to an ordinary family of brothers and sisters. He looked to her, like a separate and original creature, and her fancy conjured up a droll picture of a second Winks in petticoats only drier and sterner, and less friendly than the first.

This change of mental temperature, however, was carefully concealed, and after going through the form of partaking of the evening meal, Kate put on her hat and a warm red cloak of what used to be called "The Colleen Bawn" shape.

"Hadm't I better go with you, dear?" asked her father, half rising.

"Oh! no; don't disturb yourself. It is quite near—Alicia and I walked round by Paragon Place this morning just to make sure of the way, and can go quite alone."

"Very well; but in three quarters of an hour I'll come and walk up and down till you come out."

"You might catch cold, papa; come into the house."

"No, thank you! I see enough of little Winks by daylight, begad! I don't want him by gaslight into the bargain."

"Isn't he nice to you, papa?"

a soft and sweet, but her accent was somewhat strange to the hearers, who, like most English of their class, expected the same brogue and pronunciation from all Irish people be they peasants or peers.

Something in her frank, fearless face and simple courteous manner, appealed to Miss Winks's exceedingly Saxon nature, and her preconceived notion of a designing mix began to fade slowly.

"You had better take off your cloak," she said, as Kate finished shaking hands with Winks, though she did not offer her own.

"Thank you, I will," and Kate removed and threw it over a chair.

"Sit down, Miss Carey," said Winks, as usual averse to lose any time, and placing a chair beside his own. He began to unfold the papers before him. One was apparently a page out of some legal document, in a very clear, stiff writing, with one big "whereas" here and there and a large number of conventional abbreviations the rest was blank ruled and blueish paper.

Kate gazed at the example before her in dismay. How could she ever manage to write like that? But she would not permit her discouragement to appear.

"This," said Mr. Winks, "is a copy I have had prepared for you, this is the sort of paper that drafts and copies are always written on, and, taking a little screw of paper from his waistcoat pocket, these are the pens, or nips, generally used in my office. If you succeed in acquiring this kind of hand—your father can always procure you such paper at any law stationer—when you have attained some similarity to this writing come and show it to me."

"I will try very hard before I give up," said Kate, gazing earnestly at the sheet before her. "It looks so unlike my own hand, I am afraid I shall not succeed very soon; but I'll see."

"Your own writing is firm and well formed for a woman's," returned Winks. "I rather think you may be able to adopt this style. I must warn you that this paper is not large, and I can give no more than the customary price, though you are not an ordinary sojourner."

"No, indeed!" cried Kate with a sunny smile, "rather an extraordinary one, and goodness to me is something extraordinary too. I cannot say how grateful I am. I will do my best to imitate this, and as soon as I think I have done pretty well I will show my work to you."

"I shall expect you then this day week," returned Winks.

Kate rolled up the "example" and the copying paper. Miss Winks silently rose, found a wrapper, and handed it to her.

Kate considered herself dismissed.

"I will not trespass any longer," she said. "You have made me quite happy."

"Then you are easily pleased," returned Winks, drily. Like many of his compatriots, he shied contemptuously at anything like exaggeration.

"I mean just for the moment. Of course if I fail I shall be dreadfully unhappy," cried Kate.

"It is wise to rejoice so soon."

"Oh, yes, certainly; it is wise to get what rejoicing one can, and as soon as one can out of whatever you undertake."

But the disappointment after is severe, I presume," returned Winks.

impresses me as being honestly anxious to work and improve herself."

"H'm, perhaps so, though it is quite possible she may ask for these learned books to humour you. She is sharp, very sharp."

"If you mean intelligent, yes, and if her manners seem not quite what you approve, you must remember that she is not English."

"Oh, that is easily seen! Still you may be right, Samuel. I allow she has a very open countenance."

Meanwhile Kate, looking up and down the road, perceived her father. Hastening to him, she gleefully recounted her interview with Winks and his sister, and gave him the volume to carry.

"Bless my soul, Kate, dear, are you going to lay such a thundering weight upon your bright brains. Faith, it will crush them to bits, and as to the writing, well if you like to try, I am not the one to gainsay you, but in all my days I never heard of a woman—let alone a slip of a girl like you—trying such cramped penmanship."

"Well, papa, I have read of some girl who did, and at any rate I am going to try."

"And isn't it worth while doing for the miserable pay you'll get?"

From her sister Kate received much more sympathy. "Suppose you could make even fifteen shillings a week," she said, "it would help you with your clothes, and we are both very shabby! I must have a new dress, and that soon, because I go among strangers."

"Would it not be enchanting to pay for one's things with your own personally earned money?" cried Kate. "I believe that dear little man is going to be lucky to me! I am sure there is a soft side left to his heart, though the shell is so marvelously dry and chippy. I don't like his sister so much—she doesn't like me. I must make her like me though. You shall come with me the next time I go."

"I don't want to go, Katey!"

Sunday was eagerly anticipated by father and daughters. Carey himself went out marketing late on Saturday afternoon, on his return from the City, having the usual tendency of Irishmen to undertake some of the household duties usually handed over to the ladies. The weather was more friendly to these Bohemians than fortune, who generally punishes those who slight her favours, and Sunday came to them clothed in all the fresh and fitful love-liness of early spring.

After a brief tearful half-hour in the morning, the day was serene and sunny, and when the girls returned from church they found Travers talking with his host, and the cloth laid in such superior style, that they guessed "papa" had assisted, and they well knew that their landlady was more disposed to oblige "Mr. Carey," whom she considered "a real gentleman," even when the rent was a fortnight behind, than any other person.

"You are very good to come so early," said Alicia, shaking hands with her cousin. "It is such a long way."

"I walked here," returned Travers, "and found it a very pleasant mode of traveling. My rooms in Mount Street are quite near the park, you know. I feel the want of exercise in London after the amount I have been accustomed to. And what have you girls been about since I saw you, Kate?"

"I have been quite busy. After luncheon I shall show you my work. Mind, you are to tell me the whole unvarnished truth as what you think of it."

"All right. You know I never make pretty speeches. I would if I could, but they don't come to me."

The sisters had only time to take off their outdoor garments when the dinner was served, and whatever the outside gloom of their circumstances there was sufficient light from within to sparkle in pleasant friendly talk. Travers told some droll stories respecting well-known public characters, and discussed the political outlook with his host, broke a spear with Alicia respecting the disestablishment of the Irish church, which she considered a most iniquitous measure. Then the conversation drifted to his Indian experience.

"I had gone to Bombay with a splendid scheme of sport among the Himalayas, when my trouble began; of course, I had to drop it, and come home; not the most cheerful home-coming, as you may imagine."

"No, faith! We are companions in misery, my boy," cried Carey. "Take a glass of wine, Dick. It wine you can call it; it's as thin as our fortunes, begad. What would we have done in the old country? Hey?"

"Certainly not; but I'll stick to the beer, if you'll allow me. That is very good. By the way, I saw Jamie Tulloch while I was in Bombay. He is getting on like a house on fire; he has been taken into partnership in a rather good firm, and breathes out percentage, commission, and bills of lading. He was very hospitable however. It is amazing how these Scotchmen get on. They have a particular combination of caution and daring, an instinct for money-making; fine fellows do; I must say I like them."

"They are as hard as nails," observed Carey, "and too ready to skin a flint to please me."

"How is it," asked Kate, "that such Irish people as we are manage to have an English cousin, and a Scotch one too?"

"A very simple matter," cried Carey. "Travers's grandfather on the mother's side was great uncle to your blessed mother; and as for Tulloch, my grandfather's sister married an officer in a Highland regiment, and Tulloch is her grandson. He is younger than you, Travers."

"About the same age in years, but a deuced deal older in any other things," said Travers laughing.

"It seems a confusion of grandfathers and grandmothers to me," cried Kate. "However, I am quite willing to have Dick for a cousin, and Mr. Tulloch too, if he is as nice as Dick, with a smile, and a little nod."

"Ah, but he is not, by long odds," returned Travers, gravely; "even if he were, pray remember I have the start of him by a good many years. I have the first claim, Cousin Kate."

"Don't be afraid, Dick, no one shall out you out," said Alicia.

"Suppose we make a drawing-room of the garden and sit there for a little while. There is quite a nice corner left, with an unsteady rustic seat; this is part of what was a country place—when the country existed here. You can smoke your cigar there, Dick; Alicia will show you the place, and I will come as soon as I see the